

Political Turmoil and the Post-Eighties Generation in Kashmir: Aspirations, Anxieties, and Future Trajectories

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Kashmir is a territorial dispute embedded in the politico-diplomatic events that shook the Indian subcontinent in 1947. The most immediate outcome of this dispute has been the human tragedy unfolding in Indian administered Kashmir, where a popular armed rebellion broke out in 1989. The brutalities of the rebellion reverberate across Kashmir, flashed in the common memories of people, especially the young who have been exposed to various socio-cultural vulnerabilities. Young Kashmiris have not known a stable and peaceful society and, therefore, rebelling has become part of the youth culture. They are politically hyper-engaged with more radical political views entailing revolutionary violence as a handy mechanism for preserving societal security, territorial fortification, and justice in Kashmir.

Keywords Kashmir, youth, conflict, politics, democracy, de-politicization

Introduction

Jammu and Kashmir—located in the great north-western Himalayan ranges—is a regional dispute deeply embedded and entangled in the varied interpretations of the politico-diplomatic events that shook the Indian subcontinent in 1947. The region is comprised of three natural divisions—Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh—with diverse populations including Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs, which in turn represent multi-ethnic, multiracial, and multi-lingual groups with distinct and peculiar cultural ethos. Consistent with the 2011 census, the three natural divisions of Jammu and Kashmir find reflection in religious disjuncture too. Jammu is largely Hindu and Sikh dominated (collectively 68.8 percent), the Ladakh region is largely populated by Buddhists (45.89 percent) and Muslims (47.4 percent), whilst the Valley of Kashmir is predominantly Muslim (97.16 percent). Together, Muslims constitute 66.97 percent of the total population of Jammu and Kashmir, Hindus 29.63 percent, Sikh 2.03 percent, while Buddhists

comprise 1.36 percent.

This cultural diversity in Jammu and Kashmir approximately mirrors the political aspirations of the people as well. By and large, the non-Muslim minorities want Kashmir as a part of India, while many Muslims want an independent secular Jammu and Kashmir or a Muslim Kashmir united with Pakistan (Raghunath 2006; Sonpar 2015). Jammu and Kashmir is also considered a geopolitically strategic position in the subcontinent, sharing borders with China to the east and northeast, Pakistan to the west and northwest, and India to the south; consequently, the region continues to be an unresolved issue between India and Pakistan specifically. While India affirms Jammu and Kashmir as an “integral part” of its territory (Singh 2017), Pakistan’s official position insists that Jammu and Kashmir is a “disputed territory” whose final status must be determined by the people of Kashmir.¹

Deeply involved in the rivalry of many great powers, this confrontation between India and Pakistan has been so intense and uncertain that Kashmir has been branded a “nuclear flash point” in South Asia, endangering almost a fifth of humanity. But the most immediate outcome of this confrontation is the human tragedy that has unfolded over past couple of decades in Indian administered Kashmir, where a popular armed rebellion broke out in 1989 to challenge India for denying the Kashmiris’ right of self-determination in order to shape their own future, as recognized in various United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions from 1948 to 1957. This rebellion, therefore, does not inculcate any new demand; rather along United Nation (UN) resolutions, it resonates the promise of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of independent India, when on November 2, 1947 he declared in a broadcast speech: “we are anxious not to finalize anything in a moment of crisis and without the fullest opportunity to be given to the people of Kashmir to have their say...The accession must be made by the people of that State... We will not and cannot back out of it” (Khan 2014, 16).

Nehru continued to declare in his public statements through 1951 that the fate of Kashmir would be determined by the people, and pledged to hold a referendum in Jammu and Kashmir under international auspices to enable the people to express their will—a promise that is yet to be fulfilled. Instead what has followed, especially during the last twenty-seven years of separatist insurgency in Indian-administered Kashmir and the Indian state’s response to it, is that tens of thousands of lives have been lost. As per reports of many local and international human rights watchdogs and newscasts, over 42,657 people have been killed in the Kashmir conflict (Mishra 2010; SATP 2018), while some non-official sources put this number at around 80,000. Thousands of youth disappeared in custody and there are thousands of unmarked graves in different parts of Kashmir (Iqbal, Hossain, and Mathur 2014).

Such brutality reverberates across the valley of Kashmir, flashed in the common memories of people, especially the young who, as in all armed-conflict

zones, have been exposed to myriad socio-cultural vulnerabilities, risks, and impairments. They have not known a stable and peaceful society and, therefore, rebelling and revolting has become part of a burgeoning number of young Kashmiris' culture. The episodes of rebellion that engulfed Kashmir Valley in 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2016 are illustrative of this trend wherein nearly 300 youth were killed by Indian forces. Concomitantly, this turmoil led to further ambivalence in the already sensitive and precarious socio-political character of the Kashmir Valley and increased the trust deficit between people (mostly youth) and the Indian state.

Under such precarious conditions, the victimization of Kashmiri youth by Indian security agencies may have different underlying motives, and perhaps some of their motives have to deal with what Samuel P. Huntington—author of the “Clash of Civilizations”—stated in an interview after the attacks on September 11, 2001: “I don't think Islam is any more violent than other religions...But the key factor is the demographic factor. Generally speaking, the people who go out and...[revolt for their rights and freedom]...are males between the ages of 16 and 30. During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, there were high birth-rates in the Muslim world, and this has given rise to a huge youth bulge” (Urdal 2006, 607).

Kashmir certainly has a youth bulge with over 40 percent of the population between the ages of ten and thirty-five. Indeed, if we are to believe the current estimates by demographers and economists, India is and will remain for some time one of the youngest countries in the world with over 41 percent of population below twenty years of age. Muslims in the country have the highest proportion of young (47 percent) among all religions (*First Post* 2016). This dividend is projected essentially to advantage India in the global economy. However, the literature also suggests that difficulties with identity formation and its huge potential for socio-political ambivalence are most likely to occur in young societies in transition. Huntington (2007) insists that societies are particularly war-prone when the number of young people aged fifteen to twenty-four reaches a “critical level” of 20 percent of the overall population. And if this segment of the population is left with no alternative but unemployment and poverty, they are likely to join radical movements (Bhat 2014, 472). However, the issue of political turmoil in Kashmir cannot be reduced to mere economic and demographic notions; rather, as aforesaid, this region is highly complex and dense involving a magnitude of socio-cultural, politico-economic, historical, religious, and psycho-social juxtapositions that unintentionally provide a testing ground for Indian secularism, democracy, justice, freedom, and pluralism. Within this circle, the more the Indian government:

Develop[s] the sense that they are fighting for their own supremacy with their backs against the wall, the more savage for the most part does their behaviour become and the more acute the danger that they will disregard and destroy the civilized standards

on which they pride themselves...With their backs against the wall, the champions [of civilization] easily become the greatest destroyers of civilization (Elias 1996, 358-359).

Hence, the pressing concern for India today is to locate possibilities to fairly integrate the Muslim youth bulge in the unfolding global post-modern culture, economy, and development, rather just victimizing them with labels such as “aggressive other.” A number of studies demonstrate that stigmatization and compartmentalizing Muslim youth in delineated surveillance spaces contributes to processes of radicalization, rebellion, and rioting (Epstein 2007; Spalek and Lambert 2008; Boukhars 2009; Vertigans 2010) and I would argue that such delineation of populations produce a multitude of dark sides for governments, and de-civilizing and dehumanizing elements for nations, as such stuff creeps into the common memories of the younger generations, given added resonance, and transmitted and internalized as “knowledge” (Vertigans 2010). Altogether, with growing acceptance of violence in public, there is a danger of denting the very basis of Indian socio-culture values, which are values of mutual tolerance, of accommodation and integration (Balasubramanian 1992; Vadekar 2002), comprising the basic norms of the Indian Constitution. With Kashmir as a hotspot, maintaining this longstanding secular culture, peace, and security is one of the key challenges facing India today.

With this understanding, this article seeks to explore and analyze the patterns of political engagement of young people in Kashmir, their trust in democratic institutions, their zones of anxieties, and concomitant trajectories. A brief section on methodology below is followed by an overview of the contemporary debate on youth and politics. The key arguments are then developed with an empirical analysis involving perceptions of Kashmiri youth to demonstrate the multiple meanings that politics and democracy have today for young people.

Method, Material, and Concepts

This article is part of a wider research project. One area of this project is about the perceptions of Kashmiri Muslim youth vis-à-vis politics, democracy, and governance. It is this element of the research that is explored in this article. The responses, therefore, provide a snapshot of the opinions and experiences of the Kashmiri youth rather than a generalized overview of the Muslim majority in Jammu and Kashmir.

Data collection took place between May 2015 and January 2016, with questionnaires administered proportionally to young people in the Srinagar, Anantnag, Baramulla, and Budgam districts of the Kashmir Valley. Beginning in Srinagar City, I administered questionnaires, originally drafted in English, to student youth followed by non-student youth. The same procedure was

implemented in Anantnag, Baramulla, and Budgam. At the selected research sites in Srinagar, I administered eighty questionnaires; equally eighty questionnaires were administered in Anantnag, Baramulla, and Budgam districts respectively. Altogether, 320 one-on-one questionnaires were administered to young people in the Kashmir Valley.

Since report writing was the final crucial part of this exercise, there is an array of technical, methodological, as well as theoretical repertoire to be addressed. As C. Wright Mills (1959) argues, neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both. For that matter my key considerations throughout this article are clustered around: (1) the working argument as demonstrated in the introductory section; (2) empirical evidence; and (3) factual presentation of findings supported with archival sources, comprising the information collected from official records, media reports, and newscasts, etc.

For the operational definition of the concept of youth, volumes of classical literature portray youth as: a value concept connoting a vital force; a source of renewal for the whole society; a category of chronological age; a segment in the lapse of the individual's life; a stage of psycho-biological development; an element of social replacement; a stage in life marked by incomplete access to social positions; a marginal social category; and a constellation of ideologically homogeneous cohorts (Kuczynski et al. 1988, 6-7). On the underlying level, there is shared conjecture in this wide-ranging literature that youth is a phase of life which marks the "take-off" from one stable state (childhood) to another stable state (adulthood), with youth as the stage in which the emerging adult tries on a variety of roles and ways of behaving in preparation for making critical choices. In these lines of thought, "youth" has become a widely debated and highly contested term over the last couple decades. As I have articulated elsewhere (Bhat 2013), the meanings that are now appended to youth reflect a variety of different aesthetic, political, and ideological positions. Notwithstanding, for the concept of youth, my focus in the present study was on both male and female youth. However, by "youth," "the young," or the "younger generation," I mean the fifteen to thirty-five-year age group, because when the current political attitudes or behavior can be traced to a particular past period, the connection often extends over the entire population (Schuman and Scott 1989, 360). Equally, for young people in Kashmir, politically their memories come specially from late 1980s when the separatist insurgency started in Kashmir. This gives an ideological distinctiveness and a common generational character to all the cohorts of youth born in the post-1980s period in Kashmir, and a majority of them are presently aged fifteen to thirty-five.

Youth De-politicization and Youth Activism

Many scholars have agreed that young people are rejecting institutional politics and becoming increasingly politically apathetic (Kimberlee 2002; Henn and Weinstein 2006). No longer are youth perceived as interested in conventional party campaigning, taking to streets asking people for votes and support, i.e. what their parents' generations used to do. Such a transformation, typically captured under the remit "youth de-politicization," has been addressed by scholars working across youth studies, sociology, and social sciences more broadly. Some scholars insist that the institutional isolation of most spheres of social life (Beck 1999), the retreat of the welfare systems, and, most of all, their inability to cope with the increasing social and economic weakness of young people (Wallace and Kovatcheva 1998) have led to youth mistrust in bureaucracy and political institutions. Others demonstrate that formal or conventional politics is, by and large, clustered around the concerns and interests of adults with relative neglect of the specific needs of young people (Henn and Weinstein 2006). Still others emphasize that consumption-centred, hedonistic ethic, and egoistic youth cultures that encourage immediate enjoyment through leisure and consumer goods have diminished youths' interest to involve themselves in collective issues (Harris, Wyn, and Younes 2010).

Amidst this flow of explanations vis-à-vis de-politicization of youth, we are actually attuned to two broad reflections. First, young people are viewed in terms of what it means to live in globalizing times, which entails a regression in the coherence and certainty of once-established patterns of social (re)production, and a corresponding increase in individuals' capacity for self-determination (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992). Precisely, it has been argued that new ways of life now require young people to "produce, stage and cobble together their biographies' themselves" (Beck 1994, 13). That is to say that in both pre-modern and modern traditional social settings people acquired both sense of social order and of their having a settled, defined place in it, from the presence of established institutional pegs on which to hang their selves—their identities (Bhat 2013). Giddens (1991) calls this existential condition "ontological security," the equanimity that comes from the certainty that your world is morally and socially well-organized and your place in it is secure. However, through the recent technological, economic, political, and cultural processes of radicalized modernization, this equanimity has disappeared. One of the major outcomes of this transformation, which I have discussed elsewhere, has been the exigency of the "reflexive-self-authored subject" (Bhat 2013) with transition to adulthood and formation of social identity largely interpreted as a more deliberate and reflexive endeavour accomplished in absence of the established social and political identities, which have increasingly become fragmented, less inclusive (Rossi 2009, 469), and relatively less relevant for individuals.

Second, these radicalized transformations have not only resulted in de-politicization of youth, but have also directly affected their immediate life-worlds, characterized by later entry into the labor market, delayed marriage and childbearing, increased prevalence of cohabiting unions, and more frequent divorce and proportionately more non-marital fertility (Fussell 2002). These trends not only have profound implications for young people themselves, but also posits a big challenge to societies at large. As young people delay forming families and fewer children are added to the population, the median age of the population rises (Yeung and Alipio 2013) resulting in population aging. So obviously, in such societies where elderly population exceeds the young population, formal politics would certainly be clustered more around the concerns and interests of adults, as Henn and Weinstein (2006) demonstrate.

Tied together, these reflections of the youth situation are most visible in late-modern-aging societies: Australia, North America, the United Kingdom, and Germany. Hence this “big picture” perspective must not blind us to the worldwide tendencies. Recently, contrasting perspectives are clustered around youths’ political experiences:

In the field of politics, young people show an uncertain and unstable combinatorial logic of interpretations, vocabularies and shared representations, just as they do in other aspects of their lives where uncertainty, temporary decisions, reflexivity and the constant search for justifications also predominate...Young people construct their political universes, giving top priority to links with their own experiences of transition, the need for biographic self-realisation and the search for specific results (Benedicto 2012, 726).

Specifically, the series of popular uprisings in the Arab world in 2011, which were partly fuelled by social media, highlighted the role of the young and their culture in organized political activism (Sawaf 2013; Staeheli and Nagel 2013). The events of this “Arab Spring” posit and provide a testing case for the youth de-politicization thesis, because formal politics is no longer defined by activities like taking to streets, voting, etc., but rather young people may galvanize their cohorts by taking to cyberspaces’ and social media more broadly. Khalil (2012) underlines that “youth generated media” including Facebook, Twitter, blogs, graffiti, videos, songs, and other forms of communication developed and circulated by young people played an iconic role in protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and elsewhere in the Arab world, indeed proffering a new understanding of citizenry.

Equally what we are witnessing in “post-reform India” is a particular articulation of youth politics wherein university is still a site for student politics played across caste and religious lines (Jeffrey and Young 2012). In fact, Kumar (2012) eloquently underlines that many young people in India attend university only to enter formal politics, thereby providing logistical support during party

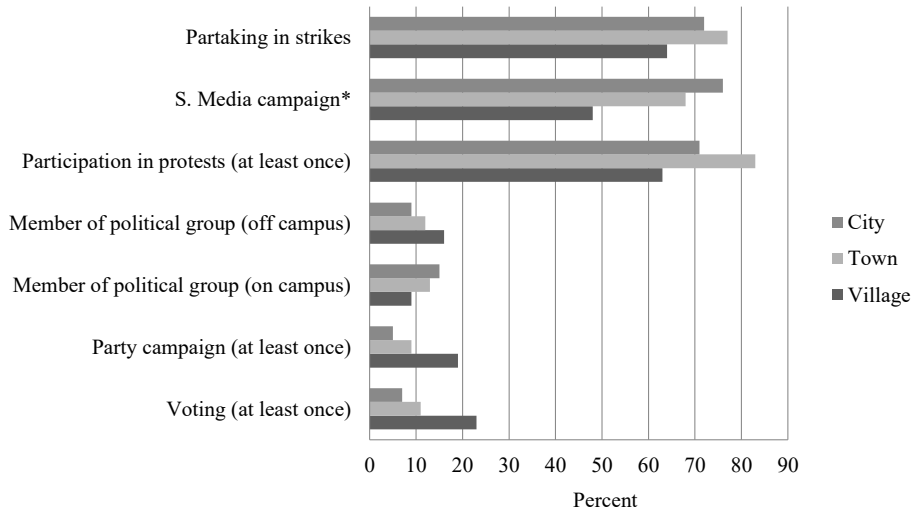
campaigning, elections, and protest rallies. Particularly for lower caste young Indians, they respond to their social and economic exclusion by reaffirming their faith in party campaigning, figuring themselves as local political workers (Jeffrey, Jeffrey, and Jeffrey 2005).

Conversely, however, the conflict-ridden Kashmiri youth display a genre of political interest reminiscent of the Arab Spring. From the 21-year-old rebel Burhan Wani, who was killed in June 2016, to university students, Kashmiri youth are on the cusp of change and they represent a multiplicity of aspirations and worldviews; however, they have a unanimous political will—*the exercise of their right of self-determination*. A decade ago, the situation was so muddled that it was problematic to discern whether the generation of Kashmiri youth involved in the turmoil were triggered by the disheartening socio-economic conditions and the political paradox characterized by denial of democracy and miss-governance, or whether these youths were influenced by the ideologies of groups outside Kashmir and so-called radical Islamic practices typical of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan. Perhaps it was a blend of both. Today, however, with strong mass protests, open support of armed rebels, stone pelting, and social media generated communications, youth have given a different shape to the Kashmir conflict—increasingly becoming a “mass civil movement” with every locality, village, town, and city equally involved. Hence, Kashmiri youth are not politically apathetic, they are hyper-engaged.

Political Engagement and Trust in Democratic Institutions

As elsewhere in conflict-zones, there are in everyday life of young Kashmiris’ an increasing array of vanguard as well as blurred signs and signals that guide their aspirations, anticipations, and future trajectories. Precisely, as Valentine and Sporton (2009, 736) argue that “it is through narratives that we constitute our social identities.” Equally, young Kashmiris’ pathways are informed and framed by the two immediate lived narratives from which they originate: a familial/class narrative that I have discussed elsewhere (Bhat and Rather 2013) and a conflict narrative characterized by political turmoil and miss-governance, which has surrounded them for last couple decades. Allied to this milieu is the overarching narrative of territory-based shared and collective identity termed *Kashmiriyat*—a sacred-secular merger often confused with Muslim identity.

With these peculiarities, young Kashmiris’ are inheriting a world where besides the widespread and increasing trust deficit between people and the state, “the space of the street is often the only...[political] space that young people are able to carve out for themselves” (Valentine and Skelton 1998, 7). This tendency is largely observable in Figure 1 which displays the patterns of political engagements of young people in Kashmir. But such a magnitude of disinterest in conventional/

Figure 1. Patterns of Political Engagements of Young People in Kashmir

Source: Author's Field Survey

*This includes youth generated media developed and circulated by young people on Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and other cyberspaces.

formal politics is now greater than at any other point in the history of Kashmir. While village youth are still somewhat interested in conventional/formal politics with over 20 percent having voted at least once and nearly 19 percent having partaken in party campaigning, only 11 percent and 7 percent of town and city youth respectively have engaged in formal politics as defined by voting and party campaigning. A very small proportion reported to be members of any political group on or off campus. However, it is worth mentioning here that many of these young people confuse religious-cum-political organizations, like Jamaat-I-Islami, with political groups.

The latest elections for Srinagar parliamentary constituencies held on April 9, 2017 in the Srinagar, Budgam, and Gandarbal districts of the Kashmir Valley proffered solid evidence of the level of disinterest in conventional/formal politics among youth. The lowest ever voter turnout at 7.1 percent was recorded. But more to this by-poll was the magnitude of violence, with over 200 incidents of violent protests reported, wherein eight youth were killed by Indian forces and hundreds were injured.

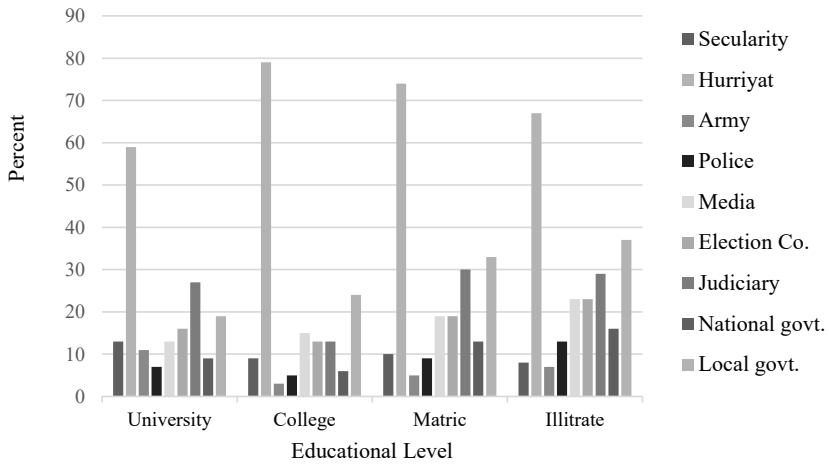
Thus, in sharp contrast, the magnitude of youth participation in protests, social media campaigning, and partaking in general strikes, which comprise the unconventional type of politics, demonstrates that the "street" and "cyberspace" are increasingly accepted as the "politicscape" that young people in Kashmir often use to articulate their political standpoints. While about 83 percent of

town youth reported to have participated in protests, the frequency for city and village youth stands at 71 and 63 percent respectively. By and large a similar trend is observable in terms of partaking in social media demonstrations and general strikes. Such disposition, in fact, displays a dramatic generational shift in Kashmir, with old norms and rules almost entirely now discarded by the youth, who with massive courage capitalize on every possible opportunity on the street and social media not only to express their dissent and maintain the collective sentiments at their necessary level of strength, but to reach the international community to reveal the magnitude of injustice, gross human rights violations, and stories of the torture they have suffered over the decades.

Such patterns of political engagement have been interpreted under many rubrics such as “smarter citizenry,” “issue politics,” and “counter-democratic” participation. Rosanvallon (2008) argues that while partaking in “electoral-representative” politics has dwindled, “counter-democratic” participation has increased significantly, which includes increasing use of informal powers and rights by common citizens to force governments, politicians, and the media to address their issues more seriously. Equally, other scholars insist that the incidence of distrust in a state is in essence a positive trend, connoting the emergence of a smarter citizenry (Norris 2002). Actually, the smart citizenry concept connotes that a good proportion of people across many countries believe that their vote actually makes no difference in how their country is run, as in India where over 34 percent of youth have such a feeling (DeSouza, Kumar, and Shastri 2009, 59). Concomitantly, people resort to other means (mostly e-channels) to comment, offer feedback, vote, rate, tweet, retweet, and petition individuals, organizations, and governments.

Nonetheless, for young people in Kashmir, these concepts partly describe their political vantage points, since a majority of the youth in Kashmir do not trust Indian democracy, as discussed in the following. The notion of “issue politics” perhaps offers a glimpse of the young Kashmiris’ rational reaction to their belief that the so-called largest democracy in the world has undemocratically deprived them of their right to self-determination. Because it is often observed that whenever there has been any encroachment upon societal security in Kashmir, young people surge-up, politicize, and mobilize to express the decades long unresolved anger that Kashmiris have bottled up against the Indian government (Nazakat 2012). The episodes of widespread protests in Kashmir due to the Amarnath land transfer controversy in 2008, popular outrage over the rape and murder of two young sisters-in-law in the small town of Shopian in 2009, unrest in 2010 over the killing of three local teenage boys in the frontier district of Kupwara in northern Kashmir, and the turmoil which started on July 9, 2016 over the suspicious incident involving a rebel named Burhan Wani, are illustrative in this stance.

Entailing revolutionary violence as a handy mechanism for preserving

Figure 2. Young Kashmiris' Trust in Democratic Institutions

Source: Author's Field Survey

societal security, territorial fortification, and justice in Kashmir, these episodes in fact mirror young Kashmiris' scepticism about the strength and reach of the local government, which they call a puppet government, to preserve and work for the interests of the society, what Aijaz Wani (2011, 282) observes as adding "insult to injury, the state of Jammu and Kashmir...[is] selectively chosen for being an unfit constituency for democracy." Indeed, as evident in Figure 2, none of the major Indian democratic institution hold the trust of the majority of young people in Kashmir. And there happens to be a slight difference in level of trust based on educational background. Only 19 percent of youth having university level education trust the local government in Kashmir, while for those who graduated from a college it is around 24 percent. Conversely, for young people who studied up to matriculation and those having received no formal education, the frequency of trust in local government is nearly 33 and 37 percent respectively.

Though a dwindling trend now, there is trust among Kashmiri youth in the *Hurriyat* conference—the separatist party—specifically a few senior leaders whose calls for strikes and protests in Kashmir Valley usually receive a large response. The least trusted institutions are the army and police along with national Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government. Merely 9 percent young Kashmiris' having university level education trust the national government, whereas for college graduates it is around 6 percent. Conversely, for young people having studied up to grade 10 and those who are illiterate, roughly 13 and 16 percent respectively trust the national government, revealing altogether an inclination that the higher the educational level, the lower the level of trust, and the lower the educational level, the higher the level of trust in Indian democratic

institutions.

Unsurprisingly, the low level of trust in the army and police has to do with the atrocities committed by them over the last couple of decades in Kashmir, especially against youth. And it was the BJP-Left coalition led Jagmohan governorship in Jammu and Kashmir that in 1990 advocated “the bullet is the only solution for Kashmiris”—exactly what they did thereafter in Kashmir. Their policy in Kashmir was clustered around the generalization that “if you are a Kashmiri, you are a Muslim, you are pro-Pakistani, and you have to be dealt with accordingly” (Punjabi 1991, 84). Altogether, this fuelled the entire situation against India with common Kashmiris’ now actively supporting armed rebels (Behera 2002, 357-358). In fact, it is this policy, which historically informs much of the activities of Hindu nationalist fanatics, the BJP, its ideological mentor Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Overseas Friends of BJP (OFBJP), and BJP’s global front Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), who follow communal lines to understand political realities with the sole purpose of creating in India a Hindu nation-state.

The Constitution of India is clear, but secularity also means tolerance and societal security to minority groups. Violent attacks against *Dalits*, several incidents of lynching Muslims for trading cows or consuming beef, and forcing Muslims and Christians to convert: these types of incidents display the magnitude of anti-minority activities that the Indian polity witnessed especially since the BJP formed the Union government, and are contributing to derogatory perceptions of India as “pseudo secular nation.” A ban on consumption of beef and cow slaughter dates back to late nineteenth century in India and to Dogra rule in 1930 in Jammu and Kashmir. Memories of this ban were revived in 1986 under the Governorship of Jagmohan in Kashmir. However, the “holy cow politics” under BJP leadership has led to heated controversy and political drama in the country with a growing sense of insecurity and fear among minorities, especially in northern India. This political environment is having a serious effect in Kashmir as a very negligible percentage of young people were found to have trust in the Indian variety of secularism as shown in Figure 2, and there is almost no difference in trust when correlated with the educational background of youth. In this sense, the latest episode of rebellion that has engulfed the Kashmir Valley since June 2016 may possibly be related to the anti-secular siege felt by the people, particularly the young Kashmiri, who want to give a fitting reply to Modi-led Centralists that they are not scared of the Hinduvta brigade and are ready to counter any such nefarious designs.

Equally, the Indian judiciary, election commission, and media do not seem to be trustworthy in the eyes of Kashmiri youth. The low trust in Indian judiciary is probably associated with the Masooda Parveen case of 2007, the Pathribal case of 2012, the execution of Afzal Guru in February 2013, and the overall denial of justice in everyday life. The Indian Supreme Court in its judgements has always

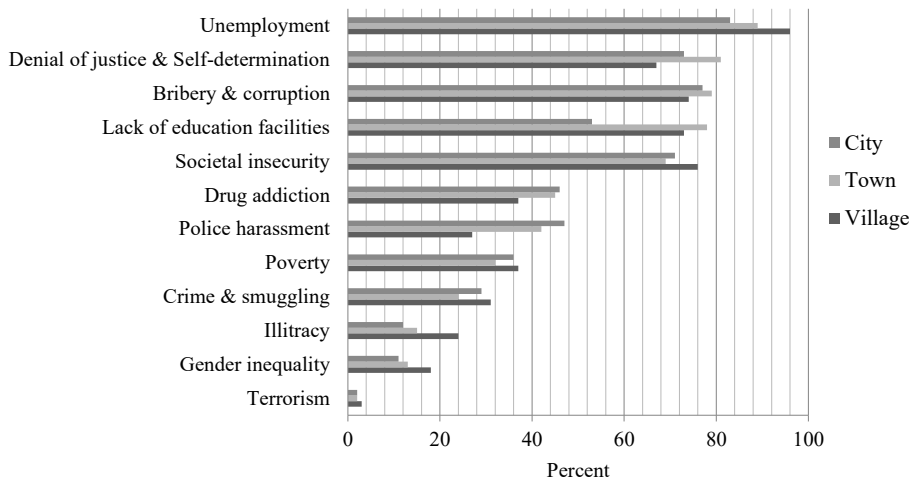
encouraged human rights violations by the military in Kashmir, with the Indian media leaving no stone unturned in misrepresentations of every such episode. Famed Indian activist Arundhati Roy (2005) underlines that the “Indian media is suffering from schizophrenia as its reports portray zero reflection about the reality in Kashmir. Indian media is busy painting a rosy picture of normalcy, which is absolutely false.” More precisely, the Indian media is habitually busy blaming Pakistan and *Hurriyat* (separatist) leaders for inciting the street protests while they deliberately avoid highlighting the magnitude of humanitarian crises in Kashmir for which the Indian army is entirely responsible.

Zones of Anxiety and Concomitant Trajectories

The evidence presented above clearly demonstrates that the wide scale of distrust of young people in Indian democratic institutions governing Kashmiri society is linked with the perception of their unsuccessfulness in addressing the significant social, economic, and political problems that have a direct bearing on the life trajectories of young people. This section deepens the analysis by studying the anxieties and problems that young people perceive and, therefore, cannot simply be ignored or their casual consequences denied in the total situation of Kashmir today. It is quite obvious from Figure 3 that unemployment, denial of justice and self-determination, and corruption emerge as the top three issues that young people consider to be the most crucial in Kashmir today. Certainly unemployment is an acute global problem (Mitra and Verick 2013). However, as aforesaid, if this dynamic demographic segment is left with no alternative but unemployment, they are likely to join underground and illegal movements (Urdal 2004).

Nearly 40 percent of the Kashmiri population is between the ages of ten and thirty-five. The unemployment rate in the state is around 12 percent and there has been over a 13 percent increase in educational participation in the last decade (Government of India 2011), implying increases in post-compulsory education and, hence, mounting pressure on government jobs. This scenario along with the longstanding conflict situation and a strong feeling of being deprived of justice and self-determination, altogether gives an impression that Kashmir is a war-prone society. In fact, outside ideologies and forces have been able to exploit the strong feelings of frustration and alienation that exist in Kashmir only because of the socio-political repercussions of the economic situation—unemployment—and because of the perception on the part of many young people that the state is not interested in the establishment of widely accessible development.

Next to the denial of justice and self-determination, which as aforementioned is a longstanding issue in Kashmir, youth from villages, towns, and cities unanimously deem corruption to be the third most serious problem in the

Figure 3. Major Issues as Identified by Young People in Kashmir

Source: Author's Field Survey

state. Undoubtedly, corruption has a good deal of history in post-1947 Jammu and Kashmir. However, bribery, nepotism, and favoritism in the system of appointments, promotions, contracts, and licenses (Wani 2011) is a result of the strong nexus of bureaucracy, higher level business class, and politicians, and has escalated to unprecedented levels in last fifteen years or so, hampering not only widely accessible development, but also risking further the already sensitive and precarious socio-political situation in the state. Indeed, a number of studies conclude that unemployment and the corrupt administration are the driving forces behind the political turmoil and insurgency in Kashmir (Soz 1993; Prakash 2000). But such conclusions should not blind us to other dimensions of reality by treating young Kashmiris as dopes reacting solely to their material conditions of existence. Nearly 76 percent of village youth consider societal insecurity a big problem in Kashmir, with 69 percent of town youth and 71 percent of city youth holding a similar perception.

For the correct appreciation of this perception of Kashmiri youth, attention should be given to the concept of societal security, as first introduced by Barry Buzan (1991), which is concerned with the threats to the identity of society; just as state security is concerned with the sovereignty of the state. If a state loses its sovereignty it will not survive as a state. Equally, if a society loses its identity it will not survive as a society. So, societal security refers a sustainable management of traditional patterns of language, culture, national identity, and customs.

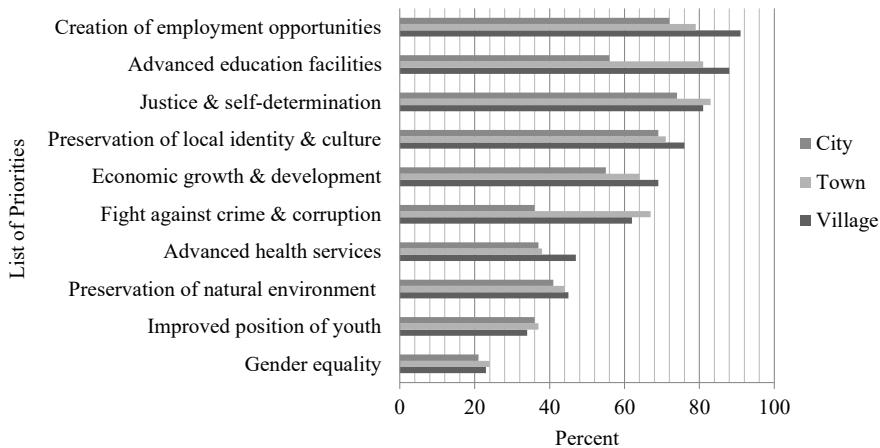
Young people in Kashmir, therefore, are not merely apprehensive of threats to their material life like unemployment, but also of their territory based shared traditional-cultural-identity characterized by a sacred-secular merger widely

known as *Kashmiriyat*. This unique identity of Kashmir is indeed guaranteed under Article 35A and Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. However, a series of threats has been posed over the last couple of decades to this unique identity of Kashmir, including the latest deliberations over the creation of separate colonies for emigrant *Pandits* (Hindus) in Kashmir, *Garwaapsi* (forcing Muslims and Christians to convert), issuance of permanent resident certificate (PRCs) in schools, creation of *Sanik* (army) colonies, and the transfer of ninety-nine acres of land to the Amarnath Shrine Board. Unsurprisingly, a majority of these threats were plotted under the auspices of the ultranationalists BJP which remains committed to changing the “state-subject” definition and the demographic profile of Kashmir, as well as abolishing Article 35A and Article 370, though observance of these articles has already eroded (Behera 2002). Nevertheless, on the occasion of every such plot, Kashmiri youth continue reacting to and protesting these nefarious designs. These demonstrations often turn violent and thus give an excuse to the state to use force and lethal weapons to silence these protesters.

Problems like drug addiction and crime also affect the perceived threat to societal insecurity, because these social issues have a direct bearing on the norms and values of Kashmiri society. At times the issue of increasing drug addiction in Kashmir is taken as a conspiracy plotted by Indian intelligence agencies to corrupt the young people, while sometimes it is attributed to foreign hedonistic cultural influences. Perhaps it is a blend of both. Yet the situation is not that grim, at least for the cohort we investigated, since a majority of them displayed an objective understanding of their socio-political context, collective orientation, and reflexive awareness about these pathological conditions. The prerequisite, therefore, is to initiate practices aimed at mitigating or resolving such problems. In this context, questions were also asked about young Kashmiris’ opinion on the priorities on which the Central and State governments should primarily focus (Figure 4).

Expectedly, these priorities for the most part are complementary to the perception of existing problems except terrorism, which does not emerge in the redressal priority list given in Figure 4. This is reminiscent of the perception of Indian youth at large, only 3 percent of them consider terrorism a big problem (DeSouza, Kumar, and Shastri 2009, 66).

Notwithstanding, our discussion hitherto substantiates that none of the major Indian democratic institutions hold the trust of a majority of young people in Kashmir, who find themselves with no choice but to resort to revolutionary violence to articulate their political positions and defend their cultural identity. However, the way that unemployment, denial of justice, and perceived threats to societal security fuel the rebellion potential of the youth bulge in Kashmir is also strongly linked to the standard of education to which they have access. As noted in Figure 4, along with creation of employment opportunities and justice and self-determination, advanced education facilities emerge in the

Figure 4. Young People's Perceived Priorities on which the Government Should Primarily Focus

Source: Author's Field Survey

top three priorities that young people recommend government should mainly focus on in Kashmir. Certainly, in the context of the new global order of late capitalism and post-modernity, advanced education facilities comprise the base of the development cycle. Specifically, for youth, the linear relationship between education, employment, psychological wellbeing, and youth development is debated in many different scientific contexts and from numerous perspectives which formulate youth life and educational life as two parallel and interacting pathways in the transition from youth to adulthood and in the formation of social identity (Erikson 1982; Winefield 2002; Morch 2003). But who is supposed to make available the conditions for this type of educational life to occur? Undeniably much depends on the capacity of the local government to realize that the youth bulge is not only democratically a destabilizing factor (see Weber 2012) but a “demographic gift” (Jayaram 2009) as well. However, the level to which Jammu and Kashmir can harness this “demographic gift” brings to forefront the quantity, quality, and relevance of education. The more high quality and advanced education facilities are available and accessible, the more likely this dynamic demographic segment is to convert into a pool of dynamic human capital. It has been widely confirmed that human capital plays an important role, especially during economic, political, and social transitions, in reducing corruption and fostering increasing participation in decision-making (Alesina and Perotti 1996), thereby increasing the prospects of prosperity, justice, and peace.

Altogether, creating adequate facilities in the fields of advanced technical and vocational education that cater to improving employability of youth, preservation of local identity and culture, economic growth and development, as well as

fighting crime and corruption are elements that should be a part of much needed pragmatism on the part of government. Most young people also find preservation of the natural environment, advanced health services, gender equality, and improved position of youth very important. This indicates that, despite the longstanding conflict situation in Kashmir, young people believe in a mixture of late-modern and post-modern values reminiscent of their changing attitudes and aspirations. Postmodern values give priority to environmental protection and cultural issues, and acceptance of centrally controlled bureaucratic institutions decreases with the rise of these values (Inglehart 2000, 222-224). While one may take it as an exaggeration to assert this about young Kashmiris' specifically when we consider their desire to preserve their local identity and culture so important, but I would ask the reader to consider the public discourse in late-modern Europe, which has increasingly become culturalist and policy responses are increasingly colored by ideology (Boukhars 2009) and where youth still privilege ethno-national identities (Faas 2007).

Concluding Thoughts

The values, aspirations, and anticipations of an individual or a group are structured by the total social and political context and by the specific generational experiences. For the post-eighties generation of Kashmir, these two combined influences—(1) the longstanding conflict-ridden society with many socio-political issues; and (2) being the group that has suffered many brutalities during this conflict, the memory of which is seared into their minds—have resulted in a specific mode of political discourse, self-understanding, and patterns of political engagements. Such modes of behavior are manifest in their lack of interest in formal/conventional politics, a scepticism about the strength and reach of the local government, and distrust in the major Indian democratic institutions governing Kashmiri society. But this does not imply that Kashmiri youth are politically apathetic; instead they are politically hyper-engaged with more radical political views and they are potentially more inclined to participate in protests, social media campaigning, and partaking in general strikes, which are types of unconventional politics. Reasons for such an orientation among young Kashmiris are not parallel to “de-politicization,” nor to what some scholars associate with de-traditionalization, individualization, or consumption-centred hedonistic ethic and egoistic youth cultures. Rather, as debated in the foregoing, the “street” and “cyberspace” are the most accessible “politicscape” in which the young people of Kashmir can espouse their political vantage points and to counter conspiracies plotted to encroach upon the unique identity of Kashmir guaranteed under Article 35A and Article 370 of the Indian Constitution.

Such disposition, in fact, displays a dramatic generational shift in Kashmir,

with old norms and rules almost entirely now discarded by the young who courageously capitalize on every possible opportunity on the street and social media not only to express their dissent and maintain the collective sentiments at their necessary level of strength, but to reach the international community to reveal the magnitude of injustice, gross human rights violations, and stories of torture they have suffered over the decades. Tragically, however, the “street” is not a hazard-free political site in Kashmir, very often proffering scenes of disaster, pain, and death. Specifically, since 2008, the street consumed over 350 young people in Kashmir mostly between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five, with thousands suffering major injuries. Devastations during the latest turmoil, which started on July 9, 2016, are illustrative of this carnage, resulting in the deaths of nearly 100 youth by Indian forces, over 10,000 injured, and around 500 youth having gone blind due to pelts—a deadly weapon that Amnesty International declares should be banned but Indian forces continue to use to demean and devastate young lives in Kashmir.

The Kashmir conflict is more political than economic, more societal than demographic, more psychological and emotive than religious, and more secular than communal. This implies that voices of resistance and freedom in Kashmir cannot be silenced with so-called financial packages² and by imposing an anti-secular siege heightened by a series of aforementioned societal insecurities plotted under the influence of ultra-nationalist groups like the BJP, RSS, and Shiv Sena. It cannot be dissolved by imposing a demographic structure of classifying people in terms of religion, sect, and region, nor can it be suppressed with inhuman and ruthless martial tactics. In essence, these are altogether counter-productive strategies close to the Emile Durkheim’s notion that to maintain the collective sentiment at their necessary level of strength, a certain amount of crime is inevitable and necessary. Equally, the more Indian political elite and military forces adopt and continue with brutal strategies in Kashmir, the more solid the social and cultural base will be for rebellion and revolt with increasing doubts among youth about the Indian state’s “integrationist” model.

Above all, with growing acceptance of violence in public, there is a danger of denting the very basis of Indian socio-culture values, which are values of mutual tolerance, accommodation, and integration (Balasubramanian 1992; Vadekar 2002), comprising the basic norms of Indian Constitution. With Kashmir as a hotspot, maintaining this longstanding secular culture, peace, and security is one of the key challenges facing India today. To avoid a big mess—a vast amount of economic and human resource potential of India dragged into war—a complete stop to creating crude binary distinctions, wherein minority individuals and groups, especially Muslims, are referred as an “aggressive other,” is needed to resolve the Kashmir dispute as soon as possible. It was Albert Einstein, after all, who reminded us that problems cannot be solved with the same thinking that created them. Therefore, Kashmir needs a political package—a serious and

sincere political deliberation on the part of Centralists with a frame of justice and fair play.

Correspondingly, one proposal suggests positively readdressing the combinatorial logic of political interpretations, vocabularies, and shared representations (Benedicto 2013) of young Kashmiris by, along with the creation of employment opportunities, justice, advanced educational facilities, and a fight against crime and corruption, making societal security as well as the preservation of local culture and the unique identity of Kashmir constitutionally guaranteed under the Article 35A and Article 370 the top priorities the Central and State governments as part of a pragmatic strategy. These undertakings would simply mean channelling and focusing attention on the needs and transformative potential of the “younger generation” into peacebuilding and development in Jammu and Kashmir. Young Kashmiris need to feel secure and a sense of belonging instead of being put under intensive surveillance and being made to feel a sense of “otherness.”

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Notes

1. Though Pakistan has been advocating for the settlement of the Kashmir issue in line with UN resolutions, this official stance has undergone some fundamental changes as reflected in President General Pervez Musharraf “four-point proposal,” which advocates “pondering outside the box” (Musharraf 2006, 302)—seeking settlement of the Kashmir dispute outside the UN framework (Hussain 2007).
2. From Rajiv Gandhi’s INR\$ 10,000 crore package in 1987, Deve Gowda’s INR\$ 301 crore package in 1996, AtalBihari Vajpayee’s INR\$ 8,687 crore in 2002, Manmohan Singh’s INR\$ 24,000 crore package in 2004, to the INR\$ 80,000 crore financial package announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 2015, the government of India has been pumping money into Jammu and Kashmir, but not to bolster its economy. Rather the goal is to improve its own infrastructure and projects like the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC), Railway and Border Roads, etc. As described by a noted local economist Professor Nissar Ali, “when money used by the Government of India for its own projects is sold as a financial package for Kashmir, how could those so-called packages have improved Kashmiri’s economy” (Yaseen 2015).

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